

## RICHARD BAXTER AND THE HEALING OF THE NATION

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In this essay an attempt will be made to establish the role and influence of Richard Baxter (1615-1691) in working for peace and unity within the English nation in the difficult period following the Civil War (1645-1648). The first part of the study covers the necessary background for understanding and appreciating the complex nature of the conflict between Anglicans and nonconformists, both under the Commonwealth and under the Protectorate. The final section relates Baxter's part in bringing ecclesiastical and political leaders together.

Richard Baxter, with a love for the monarchy and the soul of the nation which transcended religious boundaries and political loyalties, became a prophet of moderation. He took a mediating position and pleaded with the leaders of the Presbyterians and Independents to bury their differences and work together for a united Protestant England. He based his urging on simple Christianity.

W. K. Jordan's research has shown that Baxter's position

. . . represented a principle of order which appealed to sober and responsible men, harassed by the steady deterioration of Protestantism into extreme and bickering sects. . . . It appealed particularly to responsible elements of lay opinion that were seeking to coalesce on some orderly, systematic, and disciplined National Establishment which would do a minimum of violence to traditional religious conceptions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 3:317.

### 1. *The Situation under the Commonwealth*

After the overturn of the established order by the parliamentary forces during the English Civil War of 1645-1648, the question of what shape the new social and political order would take became acute. Disagreement on the matter divided the non-conformists into contending camps. The settlement of the church loomed large in the minds of many, since it was assumed that whatever form it took would almost inevitably involve the whole structure of society. The distemper of the nation grew worse as the victors battled for their own characteristic view of the right settlement for the church.

In their scramble for control of a new ecclesiastical government, inevitable with the breakdown of the monarchy, the Presbyterians were, from the beginning, clearly the dominant force. Their strength was derived chiefly from the support of Scottish Presbyterianism and from their influence in Parliament and in London.

The task undertaken by the predominantly Presbyterian-controlled Parliament in 1645 was difficult indeed. Some semblance of order must be brought into a church that was, at least to the Presbyterians, quite chaotic. The Church must—they felt—be reformed in harmony with the Word of God, after the example of the most godly Reformed Churches on the European continent.

Accordingly, the Presbyterian-dominated Parliament appointed committees for removing "scandalous ministers" and for dealing with the "plundered ministers," those who had been deprived of their positions by the Anglicans. Nor did the ruling party forget the distractions and ejection which many of its clergy had experienced under Anglican diocesan rule. Now that circumstances were different, the human spirit of revenge was manifested in the ejection of many Anglican clergymen. The vacancies thereby created were filled by the appointment of Presbyterian ministers, a number of whom had not been episcopally ordained. The new leaders were so sure of the strength of their regime, that they soon instituted Presbyterian ordination. This new ecclesiastical practice was legitimized and sanctioned by Parliament.

Officially, the prelacy established by Archbishop Laud had been abolished in 1643. Thereafter the Presbyterian-dominated Westminster Assembly began its proceedings to advise the government on a settlement of the church in terms of doctrine,

worship, and government. The results of these meetings were a series of recommendations to the Presbyterian-dominated Parliament. The recommendations included a basically Presbyterian form of government in 1644, a confession of faith in 1646, and two catechisms in 1647.

Baxter described the very significant Westminster Assembly of 1643 as follows:

Those who made up the Assembly of Divines, and who through the land were the honour of the Parliament party, were almost all such as till then had conformed and took ceremonies to be lawful in cases of necessity, but longed to have that necessity removed. . . . The matter of bishops or no bishops was not the main things, except with the Scots, for thousand that wished for Good Bishops were on the Parliament side. Almost all those afterwards called Presbyterians, and all learned and pious synod at Westminster, except a very few, had been conformists, and kept up an honourable esteem for those Bishops that they thought religious; as Archbishop Usher, Bishops Davenant, Hall, Morton, etc. Those would have been content with an Amendment of the Hierarchy. . . . The Assembly at Westminster were all save eight or nine conformable.<sup>2</sup>

Through the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, which was the means of binding the English and Scottish Presbyterians together, the Scots sought to bring the English Church into conformity with the Scottish Presbyterian model. The "dissenting brethren" of the assembly—Philip Nye, Henry Vane and others—had, in some measure, anticipated the Scottish design and worked to soften the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant.

Parliament eventually ordered that all of England subscribe to the Covenant. Failure to take the oath of subscription resulted in fines or other penalties. Yet Baxter persuaded his people at Kidderminster not to subscribe to the Covenant, for fear it should ensnare their consciences. In 1652 he wrote about his conviction regarding this:

Above all, I could wish that the Parliament and their more skillful hand, had done more than was done to heal our breaches, and hit upon the right way either to unite with the episcopals and Independents (which was possible as distant as they are) or at least had

<sup>2</sup>Richard, Baxter, *A Treatise of Episcopacy* (1681), 2:211.

pitched on the terms that are fit for Universal Concord, and left all to come in upon those terms that would.<sup>3</sup>

These are revealing words. They indicate how far the Presbyterians had copied the Laudians in their determination to bring the whole country into conformity. At the same time, in many minds there was a growing apprehension that the country had not yet been freed from intolerance, as one form of enforced conformity to authority gave way to another.

One of the most remarkable events of the period of Presbyterian control was the ordinance passed by Parliament on 3 January 1645, repealing certain statutes of Edward VI and Elizabeth I. Parliament also ruled that, after eighty-five years of use, the Book of Common Prayer should no longer be the official service book and forbade its use in any church, chapel, or place of public worship in England or Wales. The book was replaced by A Directory for the Public Worship of God.

The new Directory consisted of general instructions for the conduct of worship rather than of set forms. The principal services consisted of prayers, two lessons, psalms, and a sermon. Holy Communion followed the morning sermon, with the people seated around the table. Provisions were also made for baptism, visitation of the sick, and marriages. Burials, however, were to be conducted without ceremony. Feast days, except Sundays, were abolished.<sup>4</sup> Extempore prayers were permitted.<sup>5</sup>

The imposition of the Directory was repugnant to all constitutionally-minded conformists and royalists. They refused to accept it in place of the Book of Common Prayer. To ensure conformity, Parliament passed measures reinforcing the ordinance against the Book of Common Prayer, attaching fines or other penalties to its use. Even the private use of the book was prohibited.

Opposition to Presbyterian rule, particularly to the form of discipline outlined in the Directory, did not come only from

<sup>3</sup>Richard Baxter. *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (London: Matthew Sylvester, 1696), 1.1.117. Hereafter cited as RB.

<sup>4</sup>*A Directory for the Public Worship of God Throughout the Three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland. Together with an Ordinance of Parliament for the Taking Away of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Evan Tyler, 1644).

<sup>5</sup>A. H. Wood, *Church Unity Without Uniformity* (London: Epworth Press, 1963), 42.

conformists and royalists. The Erastians, Independents, and left-wing Puritans began to look upon Presbyterian rule with the same distaste and bitterness with which only a short time earlier they had regarded Laudian prelacy. They now began to advocate new plans for a "settlement of the Kingdom," plans which were wholly inconsistent with the temperament and aims of the Presbyterian Scots and right-wing Puritans. For instance, in the army debates of the summer of 1647, the left-wing Puritans vigorously advocated liberty of conscience and a democratic government based on a proper constitution, called the Agreement of the People.<sup>6</sup> At the other extreme of the political spectrum, the Erastian members of Parliament were equally suspicious of, and consequently opposed to, the Presbyterian measures. In their view, Parliament, not the Presbyterian clergy, should control the Church in England.<sup>7</sup>

Baxter's cogent statement, "Overdoing is undoing," aptly describes the fate of Presbyterianism for the next few years. England was not prepared for the overdoing of either Scottish or English Presbyterianism. Therefore, when attacks were made on the Book of Common Prayer, thousands in England were willing to bleed for it, even though they would not lift a finger to defend the bishops.<sup>8</sup> That book, which the English people had accepted for so many years and on which they had placed but little esteem, became the object of their special regard when its use was restricted and finally banned. Indeed, abolition of the Common Book of Prayer gave new impetus to anti-Presbyterian feelings.

In the meantime, another religio-political party, the Independents, increased their strength in the army. As a center party they were strongly supported by the left-wing Puritans and by the more politically conservative Erastians. The influence of the Independents was undoubtedly strengthened by Oliver Cromwell.

By 1658 Cromwell and his army were able to wrest control from the Presbyterians and seek, in their own way, to achieve their vision of the properly ordered society. These new leaders felt that

<sup>6</sup>A. S. P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1938), 14.

<sup>7</sup>For a full discussion of this Erastian position, Henry Parker's study, *The True Grounds of Ecclesiastical Regiment* (1641), is most useful. The Parliament Erastians differed from the Royalist Erastians in maintaining that Parliament rather than the King, was the supreme head of Church and State.

<sup>8</sup>Wood, 76.

the mistake of their predecessors was the insistence on a form of government too exact in discipline, which placed power and authority in the hands of clerics.

Edward Cardwell has focused on the cause of the Presbyterian downfall as follows:

They [the Presbyterians] succeeded in obtaining an ordinance that all parishes should be brought under the government of congregational, classical provincial national assemblies; but when they demanded that the spiritual authority of the Keys should be supported by the power of suspending from the Lord's Supper and excommunicating, with a view also to the imposition of civil penalties, they exposed themselves on all sides to suspicion and jealousy, and laid a certain train for their own destruction.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. *The Situation under the Protectorate*

From the summer of 1647 onwards Baxter was displeased with the development of events. After the defeat of the king's forces in 1646, Baxter thought that some form of negotiation would bring the dissenting and factious groups together and restore authority to the king. But Cromwell and the army were not thinking along these lines. Thus they obstructed not only the imposition of Presbyterian discipline, but also a return to the monarchy.<sup>10</sup>

On 6 December 1648, in what has come to be known as Pride's Purge, the Presbyterian members of Parliament, who had been hostile to the new leaders, were thrown out.<sup>11</sup> Cromwell and the army felt that negotiations with the king were not going to achieve the aims they held for a rightly-ordered society. The Presbyterians, on the other hand, insisted on some form of compromise that would save both monarch and monarchy. Colonel Pride, with a strong contingent of soldiers, marched up to the House of Commons and arrested or turned away the majority of the Presby-

<sup>9</sup>Edward Cardwell, *A History of Conferences and Other Proceedings Connected with the Book of Common Prayer from 1588-1690* (Oxford: University Press, 1841), 243.

<sup>10</sup>E. C. Ratcliff claims that Cromwell was more in favor of toleration than the Presbyterians. See E. C. Ratcliff, "The Savoy Conference," *From Uniformity to Unity, 1662-1962*, G. F. Nuttal and O. Chadwick eds. (London: SPCK 1962), 91-146.

<sup>11</sup>For a full discussion of this, see David Underdown, *Pride's Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971).

terians trying to enter the House.<sup>12</sup> The Rump Parliament that resulted removed whatever major obstacles might have averted or frustrated their plans for the execution of the king, for abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of Independent rule.

Now the Independent party could have full liberty of worship. Their free proceedings were calculated to enhance traditional Anglican liturgical order as well as their own particular interests and concerns.

In the turmoil that had resulted from the abolition of the Prayer Book under Presbyterian rule, Cromwell perceived that the people had developed a new attachment, indeed a fascination for the Book. Wisely, he refrained from strictly enforcing the laws against its use. In many city churches, the Book was now openly used. There is good reason to believe that the prescribed Anglican services were also followed in many country places. Part of the evidence for this conclusion is the fact that many of the earlier ejected clergy, who for conscience' sake could not feel any kinship with their moderate Anglican brethren and who had sought a compromise with the Puritan Church, now found warm welcome and friendship in the homes of many Cavaliers. In fact, a number of these clerics lived in the Cavaliers' country manors as resident chaplains and tutors of the landowners' children.

Cromwell grew increasingly apprehensive about the alliance between landowners and Anglican clerics. This is revealed in his complaint that the Royalists had "bred and educated their children by the sequestered and ejected clergy . . . as if they meant to entail their quarrel and prevent the means to reconcile posterity."<sup>13</sup>

However, in spite of this apprehension, Cromwell still maintained a tolerant attitude towards religious practices. It was not until the abortive Royalist uprising of 1655 provoked him to action that he did, in fact, announce stern measures of repression against the sequestered clergy and the usage of the Prayer Book. On 4 October 1655, Cromwell issued an order against harboring sequestered clergy, prohibiting landowner families to keep them as tutors or chaplains. It was made illegal for the Anglican clergy to preach in public or private, or to administer the sacraments, solemnize marriages, or use the Book of Common Prayer. At the

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Robert S. Bosher, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement, 1649-1662* (London: Dacre Press, 1957), 40.

same time Royalists were warned of heavy fines for violating the order.

In November of the same year a proclamation from the Lord Protector confirmed the order. But the ordinance promised some lenience toward such as should give "a real testimony of their godliness and good affection to the present government, offering that to such so much tenderness shall be used as may consist with the safety and good of the nation."<sup>14</sup>

Those Anglicans who persisted in resisting the government found life more difficult. They were, however, willing to suffer hardship and deprivation for the worship and observances of the church which they cherished with such deep affection. One such Anglican was John Evelyn, who wrote in 1656 that the Church of England was reduced to a Chamber and Conventicle, so sharp was the persecution. The continued existence and use of the Book of Common Prayer was due largely to clerics who, despite threats, held steadfastly to it.

Baxter was bitterly disappointed by the developments in both Church and State. All along, amidst the political clashes between the King and Parliament and between the Presbyterians and Independents, he had nursed the hope that some form of understanding might be forthcoming. His activities during this period were calculated to encourage the speedy realization of this hope. When the Presbyterians were in control he advised many of the leaders to devise a scheme of unity with the other groups, particularly the Independents and Anglicans.<sup>15</sup> But Presbyterians, particularly of the Scottish mentality, would hardly accommodate Anglicans and Independents, and the latter found a defender in Cromwell.<sup>16</sup>

The reasons for this resistance are to be found in the Presbyterian program for the nation and the church. Anglicans found it difficult to accept a Presbyterian church because of their rejection of *jure divino* as the *esse* of the Church. On the other hand, Scottish Presbyterians appear to have been more insistent on getting rid of the episcopacy than the English Puritans. Furthermore, the

<sup>14</sup>S. R. Gardiner, *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate* (New York: AMS Press, 1965), 3:334-335.

<sup>15</sup>RB 1.1.117.

<sup>16</sup>Geoffrey Gould, ed., *Documents Relating to the Settlements of the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity of 1662* (London: W. Kent and Co., 1862), 72.



Independents were alienated by the Presbyterian insistence on maintaining the monarchy.

The Presbyterians refused to join the king and the Anglicans unless they abandoned their theory of episcopacy. Likewise, they remained intransigent in their opposition to the Independents and Cromwell, who wanted the expulsion of the Stuarts and the abolition of the monarchy.

The Presbyterians' attachment to the monarchy was deeply grounded. They never really accepted Cromwell's leadership. This is seen in the fact that shortly after the execution of Charles I in 1649, the Presbyterians proclaimed his son Charles II as king in exile.

Cromwell and the Presbyterians clashed in a death struggle over the crown. Many Presbyterian ministers were deprived of their livings, sequestered, forced, and threatened by the army radicals because they had opposed the execution of the king and had called those who did it "murderers and the like."<sup>17</sup> Cromwell had little sympathy with a party whose sole conception of the reformation, as symbolized by the Covenant, was the substitution of a domineering Presbyterianism for a domineering Episcopacy.

In this conflict, Cromwell must be seen as a Puritan, motivated by religious considerations. One writer points out that Cromwell's Puritanism "had been from the first, what the best of English Puritanism was, not a preference of one Church government to another, but a life of spiritual, personal religion, and intense realization of the presence of God, a devotion of the entire being to him."<sup>18</sup>

Yet the fact must not escape notice that Cromwell himself declared that in the conflict between King and Parliament, and between Presbyterians and Independents, "Religion was not the thing first contested for," although he added "but God brought it to that issue at last."<sup>19</sup> He was undoubtedly interested in the peace and unity of both Church and State. Cromwell understood that many Englishmen were against bishops but had no thought of destroying the monarchy.

The Presbyterians resisted the overthrow of the monarchy at the price of their own political destruction. They might have

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>19</sup>Underdown, 9.

accepted Cromwell, but only if he had spared the king. Cromwell suspected that the Presbyterians would subvert his rule and refused to allow them to assemble in synods or to exclude Independents from church preferments.

Partly through force of circumstances, and partly through a logical development of their own basic doctrines, the Independents became known as the party of toleration. This new image gave them an immense advantage outside Parliament, for it enabled them to draw support from the parties of the left, which were almost unrepresented in the House of Commons, but very strong in the army. And in the last analysis, the Independents relied on the army.

The rift between Presbyterians and Independents widened on the question of a civil settlement. If, as the Independents said, "new Presbyters were old priests writ large," the new Parliament also bore a striking resemblance to the old monarchy. Hence they became more and more suspicious of the notion of the effectual sovereignty of Parliament and the tyranny of Cromwell. They argued for the kind of settlement that would put definite limits to Parliament's life and provide measures that would deal not only with the power of the restored King, but would also check the self-perpetuating tyranny of future Parliaments.<sup>20</sup>

The Independents would be ready to support the King if he were to accept their policy of ecclesiastical liberty and their principle of biennial Parliaments. As a part of the plan for arriving at a settlement, they proposed certain electoral reforms and the limitation of some of Parliament's powers.

### *3. Baxter's Role in the Healing of the Nation*

It became quite clear that any attempt at enforced uniformity, whether by Laudians or Covenanters, could not but widen the gap between contending religious and political parties. Baxter had been advocating a way out of the impasse: "Unity in essentials, diversity in forms and charity for all." Such, indeed, was the plan agitating the minds of many Englishmen, among them Cromwell.

Why then did not the Lord Protector succeed in unifying the country? Many important reasons could be offered. First of all, Cromwell was not himself free. Even as Lord Protector he was in

<sup>20</sup>Woodhouse, 17.

some measure forced to move cautiously in order to protect himself from the radical and left-wing elements in the Army. Furthermore, Baxter was one of his severest critics and charged him with deliberately filling the army with radical or left-wing Puritans, uniting them under the banner of liberty of conscience, and using them to promote his own interests.

Clarendon says that Cromwell was resented by the three nations. His actions were always fresh in their memories. The fact is that Cromwell, by sheer military force, had taken control of the government and expelled a large number of the representatives of England. The people never forgave him for using the Parliament, adapted of course to his purpose, to bring about the condemnation and execution of the King. Despite his attempt to moderate between the differing factions in order to bring them into some form of reconciliation and his further—and sincere—efforts to win the good will of the English people, Cromwell was still considered a usurper and, as such, was despised.

On 17 December 1654 Baxter preached before the Lord Protector and Parliament at Westminster. Here was his opportunity to declare in public much of what he had been advocating to many of his influential friends. In his discourse before Parliament he spoke out

... against the Divisions and Destructions of the Church, and showing how mischievous a thing it was for Politicians to maintain such Divisions for their own Ends, that they might fish in troubled waters, and keep the Church by its Divisions in a state of weakness, lest it should be able to offend them and the Necessity and means of Union.<sup>21</sup>

Cromwell and his policies were clearly the target of his sermon in which Baxter lambasted the Lord Protector. Cromwell restrained himself from responding, due in part to the fact that he knew of Baxter's influence. About the same time, in two personal conferences, Cromwell solicited Baxter's support for his policies. Baxter's account of one of these meetings is revealing.

A while after Cromwell sent to speak with me! And when I came, in the presence only of three of his chief men, he began a long and tedious speech to me of God's Providence in the change of govern-

<sup>21</sup>RB 1.2.57.

ment, and how God had owned it and what great things had been done at home and abroad. . . . When he had wearied us all with speaking thus slowly about an hour, I told him, it was too great condescension to acquaint me so fully with all these matters which were above me, but I told him we took our Ancient Monarchy to be a Blessing, and not an Evil to the land, and humbly craved to ask him how England had ever forfeited that Blessing, and unto whom the forfeiture was made? . . . Upon that question he was awakened into some passion and told me it was no forfeiture but God had changed it as pleased him, and then he let fly at the Parliament . . . and especially by name at four or five of those Members which were my chief acquaintance; and I presumed to defend them against his Passion; and thus four or five hours were spent.<sup>22</sup>

Baxter's devotion to monarchy was too strong for Cromwell to break. Both meetings proved fruitless because Baxter found himself defending Parliament against Cromwell's attack. The principal subjects on which the two men could not agree were the legitimacy of Cromwell's authority and Cromwell's ecclesiastical policies.

Throughout the long and bitter conflict between the King and Parliament, and until the King's eventual defeat, Baxter held high hopes that the King, after learning the bitter lesson that despotism led nowhere, would be given back his rule and respect. He also hoped that negotiations between the two parties would lead to reconciliation based on a limited monarchy and a broadly based but united national Church. When this ideal proved unreachable, Baxter laid the blame squarely on Cromwell. He was convinced that for his own interest Cromwell had executed the King and usurped the government. This is how Baxter expressed his conviction:

I thought then that both sides were faulty for beginning the War; but I thought the *Bonum Publicum* or *Salus Populi*, made it my duty to be for the Parliament, as defensive against Delinquents, and as they professed to be 'only for King, Law and Kingdom.' When at the New Moddle they left out [for the King] and changed their cause, I changed from them and was sent by two Assemblies of Divines to do my best, though to my utmost labour and hazard, to dissuade them. Cromwell having noticed of it would never let me once come near him or the Head-Quarters. I continued on all occasions publicly and

<sup>22</sup>RB 1.2.58.

privately to declare my judgment against him as a rebellious usurper till he died.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Baxter accused Cromwell of promoting his own ambitions by uniting the radicals and left-wing under the cry of religious liberty. This accusation was based largely on his own teaching of religious liberty and his view of the State.

I believe that Baxter was so profoundly influenced by his theological understanding of the nature and function of the State—a political government for the happiness of man and the everlasting glory of God—that to be consistent, he felt compelled to write that men should have "liberty for true religion, true faith, and true worship of God. For these have more than liberty." On the other hand, he thought that there should be no "liberty for false religion, false faith, and false worship," even if those who practiced them did "think them true."<sup>24</sup> Sectarianism was without doubt an affront to the glory of God and to the good of the Commonwealth.

It was well-nigh impossible for Baxter and Cromwell to come to any understanding since Baxter did not disguise his feelings for Cromwell. Baxter indignantly remarked:

The intelligent sort by this time did fully see that Cromwell's design was, by causing and permitting destruction to hang over us, to necessitate the Nation whether they would or not, to take him for their Governor, that he might be their Protector; being resolved that we should be saved by him, or perish: he made use of the wild headed sectaries then barely to fight for him: they now serve him as much by their heresies, their enmity to learning and ministry, their pernicious demands which tended to confusion, as they had done before by their valour in the field. He can now conjure up at pleasure some terrible apparition, of agitators, levellers, or such like, who as they affrighted the King from Hampton Court, shall affright the People to fly to him for refuge; that the hand that wounded them may heal them. For now he exclaimeth against the giddiness of these unruly men, and earnestly pleadeth order of Government, and will

<sup>23</sup>Baxter, *A Third Defence of the Cause of Peace* (1681), 101f. This reference, taken from his personal notes on Baxter, was first brought to my attention by Dr. G. F. Nuttall of the University of London.

<sup>24</sup>Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (1673), 4.79.

need become the Patron of the ministry, yet so as to secure all others of their liberty.<sup>25</sup>

Powicke is quite correct in describing Baxter's dislike for Cromwell's policies as the "warping effect of an inveterate prejudice."<sup>26</sup> Baxter would never endorse nor forgive Cromwell the "usurper," for Cromwell had pulled down "our lawful English Monarchy" against the will of almost the whole kingdom. He had also reviled many of the worthiest members of Parliament, some of whom were among Baxter's dearest friends.<sup>27</sup>

Some of the leading politicians, for whom Baxter's ideas had strong appeal, were Baron Broghill, Colonel John Bridges, Major Thomas Grove, Sir Thomas Rous, and Sir Edward Harley. However, Baxter's political influence was not confined to a small group of propertied men active in politics. Geoffrey Nuttall has shown that Cromwell's own chaplain, John Rowe, had written to Baxter soliciting his advice on "the main evils of the nation" that he "would judge capable of redress by the present Governors."<sup>28</sup> Baxter had earned the influence and respect necessary for assuming the role of leading spokesman for conservative Puritanism, on both religious and political matters.

Yet it seems paradoxical that Baxter never gave his support to any plot against Cromwell or for the restoration of Charles II. Neither did he advocate resistance to the Lord Protector. On the contrary, he was active in public life under Cromwell and was chosen a member of the parliamentary committee commissioned to draw up a list of fundamentals of Christianity which were to be the basis for toleration.

The question may be raised, why did Baxter not advocate resistance to Cromwell's rule if he thought it contravened God's absolute authority and threatened the welfare of the Commonwealth? The reason Baxter himself provided is very revealing. He claimed that he did not advocate disobedience because such a course of action would not be in the best interest of the common

<sup>25</sup>RB 1.1.114.

<sup>26</sup>F. J. Powicke, *Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1924), 115.

<sup>27</sup>Baxter, *A Third Defence*, 101.

<sup>28</sup>G. F. Nuttall, "Richard Baxter's Correspondence: A Preliminary Survey," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 1 (1950):93.

good. Submission and obedience were to be preferred to any alternative such as a civil war to restore the monarchy or to establish a sectarian Leveller democracy.<sup>29</sup>

It is only fair to point out that Baxter did not consider Cromwell to be the incarnation of evil, despite his denunciatory attacks of the Lord Protector's policies. He did, in fact, show some regard and appreciation for him because Cromwell "kept up the approbation of a godly life in general . . . and . . . it was his design to do good in the main, and to promote the Gospel and the dissatisfaction both politically and ecclesiastically."

The religious and political conflicts between Presbyterians and Independents were not resolved until 1660. As the final years of the Protectorate rolled slowly to their close, a state of temporary compromise was reached and the wish of the people could be clearly expressed. Thereupon, an invitation to take up the royal throne was sent to Prince Charles and his court, who had been in exile since the execution of his father eleven years earlier.

<sup>29</sup>RB 1.1.114.